

Schakowsky in Capital during Pentagon crash

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Evanston Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky watched smoke billow from the wounded Pentagon Tuesday morning, only minutes after a plane slammed into it.

Hours later the 9th District representative was still trying to make sense of what had happened there in the capital, and in New York.

"I'm sitting here in shock as I watch the images, the pictures," she said from Washington. "I still can't get my head around this."

Schakowsky said she was at House offices in the Rayburn Building when word of the first plane crash at the World Trade Center reached Washington. She headed for the nearest television screen and arrived in time to see the second plane crash into the other Trade Center tower.

"It was just astonishing. I headed back to my office in the Cannon Building, and soon after I got there, there was the Pentagon crash.

"We could see the smoke from my office building, although we didn't hear or feel the blast. At that point we told the staff that whoever wanted to go home should leave. About 25 minutes later they evacuated us."

Schakowsky said she didn't know why the order to evacuate didn't come earlier, but said people left the building in an orderly fashion.

She and other House members held a conference call with Republican House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Richard Gephardt, the Democratic minority leader, about 3 p.m. Chicago time. They decided to convene the House in an abbreviated session to fashion a resolution addressing the disaster, she said.

"That will be our business for the day, except that there will be drives arranged for anyone, not just House members, to give blood.

On Thursday we'll resume the regular business of the house."

Schakowsky, who is a member of the House Finance Committee, said she thought that "in ways we can't even conceive of now, this incident will be part of almost every committee you can think of."

She said legislators will be dealing with items such as security and finance repercussions from the attacks for some time.

She added that she, like most federal legislators who weren't on House or Senate intelligence committees, "will learn about things probably about the same time you know it."

Schakowsky also cautioned Americans not to jump to conclusions about who may have perpetrated the disasters.

"Everybody needs to reserve judgment until we have harder information. I certainly remember the conclusions reached around the Oklahoma City bombing, which were wrong.

"We need to wait," she said, referring to initial conclusions that Middle-Eastern terrorists were behind that attack.